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In memory of Muhammad Ayyub
of Mathurapur, Sylhet,
who introduced me to Islam

Special Note for the e-book reader:

This edition contains the complete text of the print edition with the following exceptions:

1. Transliterations of foreign words and phrases (chiefly Persian and Arabic) requiring special symbols have for technical reasons been omitted or reduced to standard English fonts. The reader may refer to the printed edition available in some libraries if interested.

2. The Index has been discarded as the e-book technology renders it superfluous.

3. The footnotes have been converted into endnotes. Cross-references to notes not in this part refer to the footnote number in the two-volume print edition.

4. The Table of Contents has been modified to reflect these changes.

5. The Bibliography is that for the entire series. Not all of the books listed in it have been utilized in this part.

Introduction

"...And be not like those who forgot God and He caused them to forget themselves. . . ." (Q. 59:19)

There is nothing more timely today than a translation of the remarkable work on Islam of al-Ghazzali for two reasons. First of all, the results of recent studies of medicine-psychology and religious belief confirm that the religious model works in the healing process so traditional wisdom must be made available in English for all researchers as well as readers to be able to access it and draw upon it for areas of further research. Secondly, at a time when the world is confused by the varying beliefs of Muslims and are interested in studying what the majority of the world’s Muslims believe, the works of al-Ghazzali provide the perfect opportunity.

Abu Hamid Muhammad al-Ghazzali was born in the city of Tous, northwestern Iran, in AD 1058. He studied in Tous until he was twenty-seven when he moved to Baghdad. He was appointed as a professor at the Nizamiyyah college there when he was thirty-three. After four years of a strenuous schedule, he underwent a spiritual experience which convinced him that all of the knowledge he had gained was useless in comparison to gnosis or experiential knowledge of the Divine Presence. He realized unless he left his position and was free to search for this knowledge deeper within himself without worldly distractions, he would never attain it. He therefore provided for his family and left for Damascus and other well known cities at that time.

When he was forty-eight he returned to his birthplace where he lived for the next five years until his early death at the age of fifty-three. He left behind over 400 works among them being his famous Revival of the Religious Sciences (Ihya ulum al-din) which he wrote in Arabic. Over 2300 pages, it is a compendium of Islamic practices. A few years after he finished the Revival, he felt the need to write the same sort of compendium on being a Muslim in Persian. This is the entire work here translated into English for the first time which al-Ghazzali called the Alchemy of Happiness. It is a masterful textbook on traditional psychology.

While modern Western psychology focuses on describing emotions, behavior or cognition, that is, what we feel, do and think without recourse to the basic principles or causes, traditional psychology is based on the same three centers, but like all traditional sciences, includes much more. As a result of including metaphysics, theology, cosmology and the natural sciences as the basis or underlying principles for what we feel, do or think, it becomes a holistic psychology. The goal of traditional psychology is to assume the noble character traits, to overcome our ego which competes for
our attention with our God-given instinct to attend to the One God. In this view, there cannot be two wills and therefore our free will has to be disciplined to submit to God’s will (islam).

The word psychology comes from the Greek words “psyche” or “soul” and “logos.” Psyche also means breath, spirit and refers to the animating principle of the universe. Logos means “word” and in the traditional view it refers to “the Word of God.” The science of psychology, then, when it is true to its name, is the study of the Word of God within the human soul or spirit.

Al-Ghazzali’s psychology is essentially that of monotheism and unity, the world view that “there is no god, but God” or “there is no deity, but God.” It is to see the universe and all that is in it as aspects of the One God. The world view of monotheism (tawhid) forms the underlying basis for traditional psychology.

By the word “tradition” we mean al-din which has been defined as: “truths or principles of a Divine Origin revealed or unveiled to mankind through a messenger along with the ramifications and application of these principles in different realms including law, social structure, art, symbols, the sciences and embracing Supreme Knowledge along with the means for its attainment.”

Tradition (al-din) is a point which is at one and the same time the Center and Origin of our being. Traditional psychology is oriented towards helping the individual as well as the human community find that Center as we prepare for the return to our Origin.

A monotheist (hanif) like al-Ghazzali regards the whole universe as a unity, as a single form, a single living and conscious thing, possessing will, intelligence, feeling, and purpose, revolving in a just and orderly system in which there is no discrimination no matter what one’s gender, color, race, class, or faith be. All comes from God and returns to God, while a multitheist (mushrik) views the universe as a discordant assemblage full of disunity, contradiction, and heterogeneity containing many independent and conflicting poles, unconnected desires, customs, purposes, wills, sexes, sects, colors, races, classes, and faiths.

The monotheistic world view sees the universal unity in existence, a unity of three separate relationships: (1) our relationship with others, nature and the universe; (2) our relationship with God; (3) our relationship with our “self.” These relationships are not alien to one another; there are no boundaries between them. They move in the same direction. Al-Ghazzali expresses this when he writes:

Then know that there is a station in gnosis (marifat) where, when a person reaches it, he really sees that all that exists is interconnectedness, one with another, and all are like one animate being. The relationship of the parts of the world such as the heavens, the earth, the stars to each other is like the relationship of the parts of one animate being to each other. The relationship of all the world to its Director—from one aspect, not from all aspects—is like the relationship of the kingdom of the body of an animal to the spirit and intellect which are its Director. Until a person recognizes this, that Verily, God created Adam in His image, it cannot be comprehended by his understanding.”

Other non-monotheistic religious world views see the Divinity—or even the plural of this—as existing in a special, metaphysical world of the gods, a higher world as contrasted with the lower world of nature and matter. They teach that God is separate from the world, created it and then left it alone. In the monotheistic world view, God has never left and is the destination of the Return. In this view, our “self” fears only one Power and is answerable to only one Judge; turns to one direction (qiblah), orienting all hopes and desires to only one Source. A belief in monotheism gives us a sense of independence and liberation from everything other than God and a connectedness to the universe and all that it contains. Submission to God’s Will alone liberates us from worshipping anything other than God and rebelling against anything else that purports to be God.

Al-Ghazzali’s Three Fundamentals

Al-Ghazzali sees the basis for traditional psychology leading to self-development—which in essence is the greater struggle—as consisting of three fundamentals—the same three fundamentals confirmed by modern psychology and scientific studies—affect, behavior and cognition (the ABC of psychology). The first fundamental is knowledge (cognition, awareness or consciousness). The second he calls states (affect or emotion) that knowledge or awareness produces in us. The third he calls act or deed—the action that results from our emotion that came from our knowledge or awareness of something.

The First Fundamental: Knowledge

(Cognition)

According to al-Ghazzali, knowledge should be used to come to understand the articles of belief rather than accepting them on faith alone. The articles of belief include: the belief that God is One; the belief that God sent Prophets to guide mankind to Him and that Muhammad is the Messenger and last Prophet who will be sent (until the end of time when Jesus will return) and that the Quran is the last revelation; the belief in angels and the
Scriptures; and the belief that after death we will be resurrected in the Hereafter and judged by God who will reward or punish us depending upon our intentions. Al-Ghazzali says: “It is the states of the heart, the place of our intentions, that holds us accountable.”

Beliefs

Our beliefs are the guiding principles that give meaning and direction to our life. They filter our perceptions of the world. When we freely choose to believe something is true, a command is delivered to our spiritual heart (mind) telling us how to represent what we have come to believe to be true. When the process has been accomplished with Divine Grace (defined by al-Ghazzali as: the harmony, agreement and concord of our will and action with God’s will), our beliefs can become our most effective force for creating the positive and good in our lives.

In explaining the importance of coming to the realization of the Oneness of God oneself and not accepting it because someone has told us, al-Ghazzali says:

Know that the first duty incumbent upon whoever becomes a Muslim is to know and believe the meaning of the utterance “there is no god but God, Muhammad is the Messenger of God,” which he pronounces with his tongue, understands in his heart, and believes so that he entertains no doubt about it. When he has believed and his heart is established firmly upon (that belief)—so that doubt cannot touch it—it is sufficient for the basis of being (one who submits to God’s Will (muslim)). Knowing it with evidence and proof is an individual duty incumbent upon every (one who submits to God’s Will (muslim)). The Prophet did not command the Arabs to seek proofs, to study theology, or to look for doubts and replies to those; rather, he was content with belief and faith.

He then defines what belief in submission to God’s Will (islam) means:

Know that you have been created and that you have a Creator Who is the Creator of all the universe and all that it contains. He is One. He has no partner nor associate. He is Unique, for He has no peer. He always was; His existence has no beginning. He always shall be; there is no end to His existence. His existence in eternity and infinity is a necessary, for annihilation cannot touch Him. His existence is by His own essence. He needs nothing but nothing is unneedful of Him. Rather, He is established by His Own essence, and everything else is established through Him.

Al-Ghazzali mentions five sources for our beliefs:

(1) Our environment: how we grow up; models of success or failure we learn from; what is right and what is wrong; what is possible and what is impossible.

(2) Our experiences and events as we grow up.

(3) Knowledge: what we know and do not know; that we continue to educate our “self” from “the cradle to the grave.”

(4) Results we have seen achieved in the past, learned from the stories of past people in the Quran.

(5) Setting new goals to achieve future results.

Future results depend upon how we incorporate our beliefs—how we view the world—into our own self image. According to al-Ghazzali, our firm and certain belief in the Oneness of God should lead us—as it did Prophet Muhammad—to the following beliefs:

(i) The belief that everything happens for a reason. We look for the good and positive in whatever happens.

(ii) The belief that there is no such thing as failure, only results or outcomes. If we are able to train a falcon to hunt for us, al-Ghazzali uses as an example, we can train and discipline our rational faculty to control our passions. Al-Ghazzali says that we should not expect immediate results. Change is gradual. We need to develop patience, a great virtue in his view.

(iii) The belief that we must take responsibility for whatever happens. No matter what happens, know and believe that we are in charge. The Prophet never blamed others for whatever happened. He never allowed himself to be a victim. As the Quran says: “Truly, God alters not a folk until they alter what is within themselves.” (Q. 13:11)
(iv) The belief that we need to learn from other people who are our greatest resource. Treat them with respect and dignity as the Prophet did.

(v) The belief that we need to challenge our profession or line of work and excel in it. Explore new ways of doing things. Increase our sense of curiosity and vitality.

(vi) The belief that there is no success without commitment. Know our outcome in the Hereafter as the Prophet knew. Develop our sensory responses so we know what we are getting and then continue to refine it until we get what we want. Study the key beliefs of the Prophet and then hold tight to them.

In al-Ghazzali’s view, if we firmly believe we are among those “who submit to God’s Will” (muslim), then with our cognition, affect and behavior as understood from the monotheistic point of view as our foundation, we can submit in everything that we say or do. What we believe to be true becomes possible when we know what we want—to be one who submits to God’s will—and believe we can achieve it.

**Strategies**

Developing a strategy is to duplicate our belief system. When we organize the way we think, the way we feel and the way we behave according to our belief system, we have developed a strategy. The ingredients of our strategy are our human experiences. Our experiences are fed from our five outer senses: seeing, smelling, hearing, tasting and touching. Our five senses motivate us to action. When we are aware of what they perceive and keep their perceptions in line with our belief system, we have developed a successful strategy.

The amounts we use of the information provided by our senses is monitored by our spiritual heart (mind). Are the images small or large, bright or unclear, close up or far away? How we put these together, their order and sequence clarifies our strategy.

With our resource being our “self” consisting of body, spirit, soul and spiritual heart (it is our spiritual heart that centers us), we want to learn what we need to do to organize this resource. How can we have our goal and belief achieve the greatest potential? What is the most effective way to use the resource of our “self” and its subparts? The most effective strategy has always been modeling the behavior of others who have the same goal and the same belief. For the believer, this model is that of the Messenger Muhammad who was the perfect human being.

Strategies he used included performing the prescribed fast as well as formal prayer, supplication and continuous recitation of the revelation. For the believer, revelation brought both a Law and a Way. Both serve as strategies of how to approach life in the manner in which the model approached life, and knowing that our model did not always do things exactly the same way.

The strategy of Quranic recitation is yet another form of discipline. One of the verses of the Quran: “Remember Me and I will remember you,” (Q. 2:152) makes this form of supplication a very rich traditional strategy to attain spiritual energy.

**The Second Fundamental: States**

**(Affect, Emotion)**

Our belief establishes states (emotions, affect) which then result in our actions. In this relationship and all others, our state of mind is important because that determines our emotion and our emotion determines how many resources are available to us. Our emotions depend upon how we feel physically—our breathing, posture, etc.— and how we represent the world to ourselves internally. When we have cleared our spiritual heart of hypocrisy in our acts of worship, our actions are to worship God and we are at the beginning stages of the greater struggle according to al-Ghazzali.

States (affect, emotion) are held or transformed in terms of psychology through moral values that energize us. Our behavior is the result of the state we are in at the time. Our emotional state governs our behavior. Behavior is the result of how we represent the information from our senses internally as well as our muscular tension, posture, physiology.

We have the resources we need to succeed. We have to learn how to access them. We need to learn to take direct control: Once we learn to manage our states (emotions), according to al-Ghazzali, we can modify our behavior. There is a difference of how people react to the same state. The difference depends on their model.

One of the best methods which al-Ghazzali uses over and over again in the Alchemy is that of what is today called reframing: changing the way we evaluate what something means. If our culture teaches us that change is a failure of opportunity for learning, we need to become resourceful, to realize that nothing has power over us but the power we give it by our own conscious thoughts. The meaning of any experience depends on the frame we put around it. If we change the context or reference point, the process changes.

We can reframe by context reframing or content reframing. With context reframing, we take a bad experience and show it in another way. With content reframing, we drastically change how we see, hear, or represent a situation. We learn to change the way we represent a situation so we feel differently about it. Now we are at the level of choice instead of reaction. By learning to reframe, we change our emotions so that they empower us. We can either associate or disassociate. If we associate consciously, we learn to change the way we represent things, thereby changing our behavior.
We have to aim for congruence between our spiritual heart (mind) and body.

**Clarity of Moral Values**

Clarity of values gives us a sense of who we are and why we do what we do. If we have an internal conflict between our values and our strategy, we will not succeed. Values determine what really matters in life. They provide us with a basis from which to make sound judgments about what makes life worth living.

Al-Ghazzali refers to verses 23:1-10 of the Quran as an example of believers who have succeeded by incorporating Quranic values:

Surely, the ones who believe prospered, those, they, who in their formal prayers are ones who are humble and they, those who from idle talk, are ones who turn aside and they, those who the purifying alms are ones who do give and they, those who of their private parts, are ones who guard, but from their spouses or from what their right hands possessed. Truly, they are ones who are irreproachable. Whoever was looking for something beyond that, then, those, they are the ones who turn away. And those, they who their trusts and their compacts are ones who shepherd and those, they who over their formal prayers are watchful, those, they are ones who will inherit. (Q. 23:1-10)

Al-Ghazzali then summarizes the verses to describe a person of good character.

A person of good character is he who is modest, says little, causes little trouble, speaks the truth, seeks the good, worships much, has few faults, meddles little, desires the good for all, and does good works for all. He is compassionate, dignified, measured, patient, content, grateful, sympathetic, friendly, abstinent, and not greedy. He does not use foul language, nor does he exhibit haste, nor does he harbor hatred in his heart. He is not envious. He is candid, well-spoken, and his friendship and enmity, his anger and his pleasure are for the sake of God Most High and nothing more. 10

In the Alchemy (as well as in the Revival), al-Ghazzali devotes the major part of the work to clarity of moral values by describing in great detail what he calls the Destroyers and the Deliverers. He not only describes them in each of those parts, but offers treatment as to how to get rid of them (the Destroyers) or how to incorporate them into our personality (the Deliverers). Doing this clarifies the moral values of the one who submits to God’s Will.

As a result of the performance of the acts of worship, if accompanied by Divine Grace, the one who submits to the Will of God will be receptive to the adoption of positive dispositions (the Deliverers) like temperance, courage, wisdom, and justice and be able to avoid negative dispositions (the Destroyers) like anger, fear of other than God, cowardice, lust, envy, apathy, preconsciousness (knowing that you do not know), unconsciousness (not knowing that you do not know) and overconsciousness (knowing but deceiving the self about it), but only on the condition that others benefit from the positive dispositions one has attained. This, then, makes it obligatory on the one who has submitted to the Will of God to come to know and act upon the commands that underlie the relationship of self to others.

**Energy**

The entire human organism is a complete system that makes use of energy transformed from food and air to satisfy its various natural dispositions. Perception (external and internal senses) and motivation develop, according to traditional psychology, from the animal soul. Motivation is the seat of impulses towards inclinations which are imprinted on the external or internal senses and then, through filtering into what is called the practical intellect (the mind), a response is given. Three energy sources are active in this perspective: natural (venial, tabiyya), vital (arterial, nafsaniyah), and nervous (hawaniyah). These transformed energies are distributed throughout the body. The heart is considered to be the point of contact between the energy of the body and that of the self.

Without the necessary energy, which according to al-Ghazzali comes from spiritual practices, we reach a state of hopelessness and despair. For instance, if someone asked: “If one has been condemned to hardship, what is the benefit of the greater struggle?” Al-Ghazzali explains this attitude:

Your question is valid. These words are correct in that they are the cause of the illness of our heart. That is, when a sign of a concept that a person has been condemned to hardship falls upon his heart, they cause him to make no effort, neither sowing nor reaping. Such a sign would be when a person who has been condemned to death becomes hungry the thought occurs in his heart not to eat. He says: “What
good is bread to me?” He does not extend his hand to eat and he does not eat until by necessity he dies. If he has been condemned to poverty, he says: “Of what use is sowing seed?” so he neither sows nor reaps. And he for whom happiness has been decreed, he has been made aware that wealth and life have been decreed for him. They have been decreed because he has cultivated, done business, and consumed. Therefore, this decree is not invalid; rather it has reasons”.

The Third Fundamental: Actions

(behavior)

Knowledge alone is not sufficient for we who accepted the trusteeship of nature and were endowed with the Divine Spirit which includes our abilities to choose, to discern, and to gain consciousness of our “self.” It is through actions based on knowledge that the centered self benefits another as proof of being centered. The major pillars include ritual purity (taharah) and ritual prayer (salah), ritual fast (saum), the paying of the alms tax (zakah), the pilgrimage (hajj), counseling to positive dispositions and preventing the development of negative ones (amr bil maruf wa nahy an al-munkar) and jihad or struggle in the Way of God, the greater struggle of which is the inward struggle of the self (jihad al-akbar). The last two are the major concern of traditional psychology.

Bonding Power or Rapport

Bonding and communicating are aspects of action—proof of the extent of transformation through attaining the goal that we had intended. The power to bond with others is an extraordinary human power. It comes in the true sense when bonding develops from the heart and not from either the intellect or the passions. It comes from a deep love for one’s fellow human being and arises when we try to meet the needs of others before our own needs, much like a mother with her new born child.

Al-Ghazzali quoting from the Quran, the Prophet and the Companions mentions how important it is to eat with other people and to perform the formal obligatory prayer with other people.

Communicators

Believers should conceivably be master communicators on all three levels—with self, with others and with the Source. How we communicate determines the quality of our lives. Through spiritual disciplines like, for example, prescribed fasting, believers are given an opportunity, a challenge. If they are able to communicate that challenge to themselves successfully, they will find the ability to change. This is not to accept prescribed fasting as only a religious duty but rather as a divine challenge, as a chance for growth instead of an experience which limits self. In this way we will become master communicators because our very life will communicate our vision, goal and beliefs to others to help them change for the better, as well.

Relationship To Others

Al-Ghazzali discusses knowledge (cognition), states (affect) and action (behavior) in three relationships: our relationship with others; our relationship with our Creator-Guide; and our relationship with our “self.”

The model for this is the sunnah of Muhammad who said, “I was sent to complete the noble qualities of dispositions,” explaining that God loves the positive dispositions and not the negative ones. Al-Ghazzali also quotes another Tradition in this regard, “By Him in whose hand is my life, no one shall enter paradise except the one who has positive dispositions.” Al-Ghazzali says, “God taught [Muhammad] all the fine qualities of disposition, praiseworthy paths, reports about the first and last affairs, and matters through which one achieves salvation and reward in future life and happiness and reward in the world to come.”

Quoting the Traditions, al-Ghazzali shows the relationship established by the Prophet with others.

And the Messenger said: “There are not two persons who love each other for the sake of God that the one most beloved by God is the one loves the other the most.” And he said: “God Most High says: ‘My love is a right for those who visit one another for My sake, who love each other for My sake, who are generous to each other with their wealth for My sake, and who aid each other for My sake.” And he said: “On the Day of Resurrection God Most High will say: ‘Where are those persons who loved each other for My sake so that I may
keep them in My shadow on this day when there is no shade for the people in which to take refuge?" And he said: "There are seven persons on the Day of Resurrection who, when there will be no shade for anyone, will be in the shadow of God Most High: the just leader (imam), the young person who began worshipping God Most High at the beginning of his youth, the man who leaves the mosque with his heart attached to the mosque until he returns to it again, two people who love each other for the sake of God Most High and who come together for that and separate for that, the person who remembers God Most High in private and whose eyes fill with tears, and the man who when called by a magnificent and beautiful woman says to her: 'I fear God Most High,' and the man who gives voluntary charity with his right hand so that the left hand has no knowledge of it." And he said: "No one visits a brother for the sake of God Most High save that an angel cries out, saying: 'Be happy and blessed! Thine is the heaven of God Most High!'" And he said: "A man was going to visit a friend. God Most High sent an angel in his path who asked: 'Where are you going?' He replied: 'To visit such-and-such a brother.' (The angel) asked: 'Do you have some business with him?' He said: 'No.' (The angel) asked: 'Are you related to him in some way?' He said: 'No.' (The angel) asked: 'Has he done something good for you?' He answered: 'No.' (The angel) said: 'Then why are you going to him?' He answered: 'I love him for the sake of God.' (The angel) said: 'Then, God Most High has sent me to you to give you the good news that God Most High loves you because of your love for him, and has made heaven an obligation for both of you yourselves.' And the Messenger said: "The strongest resort of faith is love and enmity for the sake of God Most High." 12

Al-Ghazzali describes relationships with others ranking them in degrees.

The first degree is that you love someone for some reason linked with him, but that motive is religious and for the sake of God Most High; as you like your teacher because he teaches you knowledge. That friendship is of a divine nature since your aim for (acquiring) this knowledge is the Hereafter, not rank or wealth. If the object be the world, that friendship is not of that kind. If you love your student so that he learn from you and may obtain the pleasure of God Most High through learning, (you) too obtain the spiritual reward of teaching. This is for the sake of God Most High. But if you love (him) for the sake of dignity and retinue, it will not be of that kind. If a person gives voluntary charity and likes a person on the condition that he deliver that to the poor; or he invites some poor people and likes a person who prepares a good meal, then such friendship is for the sake of God. Indeed, if one likes someone and gives him bread and clothing to give him the leisure to worship (God), it is friendship for the sake of God, since his motive is the peace of mind for worship.

Many religious scholars and worshippers have had friendships with the rich and powerful for this reason. Both were counted as friends for the sake of God Most High. Moreover, if one loves his own wife because she keeps him from corruption and because of the bringing forth of children who will supplicate for him, such love is for the sake of God Most High and everything you spent for her is a voluntary charity. Indeed, if one likes someone and gives him bread and clothing to give him the leisure to worship (God), it is friendship for the sake of God, since his motive is the peace of mind for worship.

The second degree is greater. It is that one love a person for the sake of God without having any expectations from him; instead, it is by reason of obedience to God and for the love of Him that he loves the other. Moreover, because he is a servant of God and created by Him—such friendship is divine. It is greater because this arises from the excess of one’s love of God Most High, so much so that it reaches the boundaries of passionate love. Whoever is in love with someone, loves (that person’s) district and neighborhood. He loves the walls of (that person’s) house; indeed, he loves the dog roaming the quarter’s streets, and he likes that dog more than other (dogs). He is compelled to love the friend of his beloved, and beloved of his beloved, the people who obey the commands of his beloved; (the beloved’s) servants, captives, or relatives; all of these he loves out of necessity, for his love spreads to whatever has a relation with his beloved. As his love increases so it does with the others who follow and are connected with the beloved. 13

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Establishing the Relationship

Between the Self and Our Creator-Guide

This relationship is established, according to al-Ghazzali, through the commands of worship (ibadah), which are the most fundamental means of communication between our “self” and God. They embody the same three aspects: knowledge (cognition), states (affect, process) and action (behavior). One who submits to the Will of God seeks knowledge of particular guidance. This produces a “state” (emotion) in the self which then responds with an action as al-Ghazzali explains:

Know that object and kernel of all acts of worship are the remembrance of God Most High; that the buttress of Islam is obligatory formal prayer, the object of which is the remembrance of God Most High. As He said: Surely (formal) prayer prevents lewdness and evil, and indeed the remembrance of God is greater (than all else). (Q. 29:45)

Reading the Quran is the most meritorious of the acts of worship, for the reason that it is the word of God Most High (reading or reciting it) is remembering Him. Everything that is in it all cause a renewal of the remembrance of God, may He be praised and exalted. The object of fasting is the reduction of the carnal appetite so that the heart, liberated from the annoyance of the carnal appetites, becomes purified and
the abode of remembrance; for when the heart is filled with carnal appetite, it is not possible to remember (Him); nor does (the remembrance) affect one. The object of the greater pilgrimage, which is a visit to the House of God, is the remembrance of the Lord of that House and the incitement of longing for meeting Him.

Thus the inner mystery and the kernel of all of the acts of worship are remembrance. Indeed, the basis of Islam is the declaration: “there is no god but God”; this is the source of remembrance. All other acts of worship stress this remembrance. God’s remembrance of you is the fruit of your remembrance of Him; what fruit could be greater than this? For this He said: So remember Me, I shall remember you. (Q. 2:152)

This remembrance must be continuous. If it is not continuous, it should be most of the time; for salvation is tied to it. For this He said: And remember God much; perhaps you will be successful. (Q. 62:10) He says that if you have the hope of salvation, the key to that is much remembrance, not a little, and more frequently, not less.

And for this He said: Those who remember God standing, sitting, and lying down. (Q. 3:191) He praised these people because they do not neglect (remembrance) standing, sitting, lying down, or in any condition. And He said: Remember thy Lord, (O Muhammad), within thyself humbly and with awe, in a soft voice, in the morning and in the evening, and be not of the neglectful. (Q. 7:205) He said: “Remember Him with weeping, fear, and in concealment, morning and evening, and do not neglect (this) at any time.”

The Messenger was asked: “What is the best of acts?” He answered: “That you die with your tongue moist with the remembrance of God Most High.” And he said: “Should I not inform you of the best of your actions—the most acceptable to the King, may He be exalted—and your highest degrees, that which is better than giving alms of silver and gold, and better than shedding your blood in battle against enemies in defense of the faith?” They asked: “What is that, O Messenger of God?” He said: “The remembrance of God.” The remembrance of God Most High! And he said: “Whoever remembering me engages in worshipful supplication of God, his gift is, in my opinion, greater and better than giving (charity) to beggars.” And he said: “The rememberer of God Most High among the heedless is like a living person amongst the dead, or like a green tree amongst dead vegetation, or like the warrior for the faith who stands fighting amongst those fleeing.

In summary, the strength of one’s love for God Most High is in accordance with the strength of one’s faith. The stronger one’s faith, the more overwhelming one’s love is.

Know Your “Self”

The most important relationship for the purposes of traditional psychology is that of our relationship to our “self.” Our “self” as we have seen, consists of body, spirit, soul and spiritual heart. We turn now to the Alchemy’s Prolegomena (added here by al-Ghazzali, it does not appear in the Revival) where al-Ghazzali explores how to come to know the “self” in great detail.

Notes to the Introduction

1 See works like Timeless Healing: The Power and Biology of Belief by Herbert Benson; Why God Won’t Go Away: Brain Science and the Biology of Belief by Andrew Newberg, Eugene D’Aquili and Vince Rause; and Handbook of Religion and Health edited by Harold G. Koenig, Michael McCullough and David B. Larsen.

2 Other well known writers and poets born in Tous include Abu Yazid Bistami, Husayn bin Mansur Hallaj, Abu Said Abil-Khayr, Nizam al-Mulk, Ferdousi and Umar Khayyam.

3 See Bibliography to the Introduction for the numerous books that detail the life of al-Ghazzali. It is interesting to note that al-Ghazzali wrote the Alchemy of Happiness when the First Crusade ruled Jerusalem. Saladin arrived on the scene seventy-seven years after al-Ghazzali’s death.

4 See below for the definition of traditional psychology which historically was called the science of ethics or practical wisdom (hikmat al-amali).

5 Knowledge and the Sacred, p. 68.

6 Alchemy, p 841.

7 This is a clear distinction with modern secular psychology which is limited to only treating a human being part by part instead of holistically. See
Abundant gratitude and thanks, in the number of the stars in the sky, the droplets of the rain, the leaves of the trees, the grains of sand in the desert, and the particles of the earth and the sky, to that God Whose attribute is Oneness, and Whose special nature is Majesty and Grandeur, Greatness and Superiority, and Glory and Goodness. No created being is cognizant of the perfection of His Majesty. No one other than He may penetrate the true reality of His knowledge; indeed, the declaration of our inability to do so is the limit of the knowledge of the truly righteous. The confession of (their) shortcomings in praising and appreciating Him is the furthest limit of the angels’ and the prophets’ appreciation of Him.

The farthest limit (achieved by) human reason through the principles of the Illumination of His sublimity is bewilderment. The ultimate end of the journey of the wayfarers and disciples in their search for proximity to His awesome beauty is astonishment. Abandoning hope in the principle of (striving for) the knowledge of Him is the denial of His attributes while the claim to a perfect knowledge of Him is the imagining of a similitude and a likening. The portion for all the eyes that would gaze upon the beauty of His essence is bedazzlement, and the fruit of the contemplation of the wonders of His creation to all intellects is necessary knowledge.

Let no one reflect upon the Nature and the What of the vastness of His essence! Let no heart neglect for one moment the wonders of His creation and (question) the nature and origin of His existence, so that one necessarily recognizes that all are the signs of His power and the lights of His grandeur. All these are the inventions and marvels of His wisdom. All are the rays of the beauty of His presence. All are His; indeed, the existence of all things is (but) a ray of the light of His existence.

Praise be to Muhammad the Chosen One, upon whom be the peace and blessings of God, who is the lord of the prophets and the guide and the way for the believers. He is the trustee of the secrets of divinity, chosen and selected by the Divine Presence; and (praise be) to his helpers and the people of his house, each one of whom is a model for the nation and a discloser of the Way of the Religious Law.

Now, know that mankind was not created frivolously or upon a whim; instead, his role is grand and his peril is great. Though man is not eternal and does not live forever, though his body is earth and clay, the truth of his soul is exalted and divine. His essence—though it is mixed and permeated in the beginning with bestial, wild, and devilish characteristics—is cleansed of these impurities and becomes fit for the Divine Presence when he strives to repent.

From the lowest of the low to the highest of the high, all the dips and rises are (man’s) work. The lowest of the low is he who descends to the level of beasts, ferocious animals, and devils. He is the prisoner of his carnal appetite and anger. The highest of the high is he who attains the level of the angels and is liberated from his carnal appetite and anger. Both of them (appetite and anger) become his prisoners and he their ruler. When he attains such sovereignty, he becomes worthy of service to the Divine Presence, and such worthiness is the attribute of the angels and the perfection of the state of man. When he enjoys the pleasure of the beauty of the Divine Presence, he will not be able to withhold himself from its contemplation for one moment. Gazing upon that beauty becomes his heaven. That “heaven” which is the result of the appetite of the eyes, the genitals, and the stomach will be abridged for him.
Since the essence of man is, at the outset of creation, deficient and base, it is not possible for him to attain the stage of perfection from this deficiency without strenuous effort and treatment.

**al-Ghazzali’s Excursus**

Just as that alchemy that transforms copper and bronze to the purity and beauty of pure gold is difficult and not known by everyone; so too the alchemy that will transform the essence of man from his baseness and bestiality to the purity and preciousness of the angelic state in order to achieve everlasting happiness is also difficult and not known by all. The purpose of this book is to describe the compounding of this alchemy which, in truth, is the alchemy of eternal (spiritual) happiness. With this in mind, I have named this book *The Alchemy of Happiness*.

The noun *Alchemy* is preferred because the difference between copper and gold lies not in yellowness and the reward of this alchemy is nothing more than (mere) wealth in this world. How long does this world itself last? How great is the difference between bestial and angelic attributes, from the lowest of the low to the highest of the high? But, the fruit of this *Alchemy of Happiness* is eternal; there is no limit to it! Its varieties of pleasure have no end, nor shall any annoyance tarnish its pleasure.

Know that the philosopher’s stone (of the alchemist) is not to be found in any old woman’s cupboard; rather it is found in the treasury of kings. So, too, the alchemy of happiness is not everywhere; it is in the Divine Treasury. And the Treasury of God is the essence of the angels in the heavens and the hearts of the prophets on earth. So, whoever, other than the noble prophets, seeks to achieve this alchemy is in error. In the season of the Resurrection, his insolvency will be disclosed and his false coinage made public. His imaginings will disgrace him, and it will be said to him *Now We have removed from thee thy covering and piercing is thy sight this day* . (Q 50:22)

Of the greatest of the mercies of God Most High, one is that He sent 124,000 prophets to mankind for this purpose: to teach them the formula of this alchemy and to inform them how to place the soul (dil) in the crucible of striving, and how to cleanse from it the immoral characteristics from which come the wickedness and tamishing of the soul, and how to draw the praiseworthy attributes to it. It was for this, as God Most High himself gloried in His Own sovereignty and purity, that He further glorified (Himself) by sending the prophets, may God bless them all. And He tasked them, saying:

*All that is in the heavens and all that is in the earth glorifieth God, the Sovereign Lord, the Holy One, the Mighty, the Wise. It is He Who hath sent among the unlettered ones a messenger of their own, to recite unto them His revelations and to purify them, and to teach them the Book and Wisdom, though before (this) they were indeed in manifest error.* (Q. 62:1-2)

This *purifying them* is to cleanse them of the unbecoming traits that are the attributes of brutish beasts. *Teaching them the Book and Wisdom* is that mankind be clothed in the raiment of angelic attributes.

The object of this alchemy is to strip away all that should not be (the attributes of deficiency); and to adorn (a person) with what should be (the attributes of perfection). The secret of this alchemy is that one must turn away from this world and bring oneself to God Most High, as He first taught the Prophet (S), saying: *Remember the name of thy Lord and devote thyself to Him, a great devotion.* (Q. 73:8) The meaning of *devotion* is to cut oneself off from all else and give one’s self to Him in its entirety.

In short, this alchemy is that, but its explanation is lengthy.

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**On Intention, Truthfulness and Sincerity**

Know that it has been disclosed to the circumspect that all mankind have been ruined save the worshippers; and all the worshippers are lost save the learned; and all the learned are lost save the implementers; and all the implementers are lost save the sincere; and the sincere are in great danger. Therefore, without sincerity, all pains taken are lost. Moreover, sincerity and truthfulness do not exist except in the Intention. How can a person, who does not know keep, sincerity in (the intention)? Let us discuss the meaning of the Intention in one part, the meaning of the true nature of Sincerity in another part, and the true nature of Truthfulness in a third part. 1

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**Part One: Concerning Intention**
First, one must learn the virtue of the Intention. For the spirit of all works is the Intention. The judgment (of the act) belongs to that, and God Most High looks from the deed to the intention. It is for this that the Messenger (S) said: “God Most High does not look at your outward appearance and qualities; He looks at your heart 2 and deeds.” (His) looking at the heart is because it is the locus of intention. And the Messenger (S) said: “Deeds are according to intention. Every person receives from his act of worship that which is his intention for that. Whoever emigrates, that is, who leaves his own town to fight in defense of Islam or to perform the Greater Pilgrimage for the sake of God Most High, his emigration is for the sake of God Most High. Whoever does this in order to obtain some wealth or to marry some woman, his emigration is not for the sake of God Most High. It is for that which he seeks.” And he said: “Most of the martyrs of my people die on beds and pillows. Many are killed between two ranks, whose intention God Most High knows better.” 3 And he said: “A servant of God does many good deeds and the angels carry (the deeds) up (to God). God Most High says: ‘Expunge that from his record, for he did not do it for Me, but write down such-and-such of his deeds.’ They say: ‘O Lord God! He has not done that!’ (God) says: ‘But he had formed the intention to do so.’” 4 And the Messenger (S) said: “There are four kinds of people: One has wealth and spends it wisely, another says: ‘If I had it, I would do the same.’ The reward for both is the same. Another has wealth, but does not use it according to the rule of expenditure, and another says to himself: ‘If I had it, I would do the same.’ Both are equal in offending and sin. That is, the intention by itself is just like doing it as well.”

Anas says: “One day during the Tabuk expedition, the Messenger (S) came out and said: ‘In Madinah, there are many people who are our partners in the reward and hardships of travel and the hunger that we endure.’ We said: ‘Why, when they are not with us?’ He said: ‘They have stayed back excused, but their intention is the same as ours.’” During a drought, one of the Children of Israel came upon a mountain of sand. He said: “If this had been all wheat, I would have given it all to the poor.” Revelation came to the messenger of that era that he should say to that person: “God Most High has accepted thy charity and has given thee as much spiritual reward as if thou hadst had all that wheat and had given it away in charity.”

The Messenger (S) said: “There is always poverty before the two eyes of him whose intention and ambition are the world, and he leaves the world as a lover of the world. God Most High keeps the soul of him whose intention and ambition are for the Hereafter rich. He leaves the world and he is an ascetic in it.” And the Messenger said: “When the Muslims stand in ranks against the unbelievers, angels begin to write on scrolls: ‘So-and-so fights zealously; so-and-so fights with ardor.’ Ye say that so-and-so was killed in the way of God Most High. Whoever fights so that the creed of Unity will prevail is on the path of God Most High.” And he said: “Whoever marries with the intention of not paying the dowry 4 is an adulterer. Whoever borrows money with the intention of not repaying it is a thief.”

Know that the learned religious scholars have said: “First learn the intention of the deed; then, the deed.” Someone said: “Teach me an act that I may be engaged with night and day so that I not be devoid of good at any time.” They said: “If thou canst not perform a good deed, then continually form good intentions so that the spiritual reward of that (unperformed deed) may be obtained.” Abu Hurayrah said: “Mankind will be assembled on the Day of Resurrection according to their intentions.” Hasan Basri says: “Eternal Paradise without end is not with the acts of these few days (of life on earth). Rather, it is with good intentions, for there is no end to (good) intentions.”

The True Nature of Intention

Know that a human being does not act so long as he does not have three things: (in Arabic) knowledge, desire, and power; that is (in Persian), knowledge, desire, and power. 5 For example, if one does not see food, one does not eat. If one sees it, but if there is no need (to eat) or desire (for food), one also does not eat. And, if there is desire but the hand is paralyzed, unable to perform work, one also does not eat, for one does not have the power. Therefore, these three things precede all acts. But action is subservient to power, and power is subservient to desire and will, for compulsion compels power to act. However, need is not subservient to knowledge, for one sees many things and does not desire them. Moreover, without knowledge, desire does not form either; for, why would one desire something one does not know? Intention is composed of all three: of desire, of power, and of knowledge. Desire is what prompts it and sets it to work. That is also called motive, purpose, and intention. All three have one meaning.

Thus, the motivation that has prompted one to act is sometimes one and sometimes two motives that have joined in one thing.

That which is “one” is called “pure.” It is like the person who has been sitting down. A lion makes for him. He jumps up and runs away. His intention and his motivation are nothing more than one, and that is flight. In the same way, when some dignitary enters through a door, a person stands up for him. There is no motivation other than to show him honor. This is pure.

As for the motivation being twofold, there are three types:

One is that each motivation be thus: If it were single it would impel him to act, as when a poor relative requests a dirham one gives it to him (both) for his kinship and his poverty. (The donor) knows from his own heart that if (the requester) were not poor, he would have given it anyway (because of kinship); and if (the requester) were poor but not a relative, he would also have given it (because of the requester’s poverty). These are two motivations and two intentions, mixed together in partnership.

Another kind is that one knows that if (the requester) were a relative but not poor, or poor and not a relative, he would not have given it; but since both (requisites) had come together, he was moved to give. The similitude of the first is that of two men who are lifting a stone that each one would be able to do by himself. The similitude of the (second) is that of two weak men who, by the strength of each other’s arms, lift a stone which
each one would not be able to do by himself.

The third is that one motivation be weak and not impel one to act, while the other is strong enough to cause one to act by itself, but because of the former, doing so is easier; just as when a person performs the obligatory evening prayer alone, but when people are present it is easier for one and more lively. However, if he were not in hope of spiritual reward, he would not perform the prayer to be seen by others. Its similitude is that of the strong man who can raise a stone, but is helped by a weak man too, so that it becomes easier.

Each one of these has a different rule, as will be discussed in (the Part about) Sincerity (below). The purpose of this is that thou know that the meaning of intention is motivation, cause, and stimulus. Sometimes this is pure and sometimes mixed.

*Excursus: [Why the Intention of the Believer Is Better Than His Deed]*

Know that the Messenger (S) has said: “The intention of the believer is better than his deed.” The intention of the believer is better than his deed: he did not mean by this that an intention without the deed is better than a deed without the intention. For, this itself is not a secret, that a deed without the intention is not an act of worship, while an intention without the deed is an act of worship. Instead, the meaning is that one’s devotion is with body and soul, and these are two parts. Of these two, that which is in the soul is better. The reason for this is that the aim of an act of the body (lasts) until the disposition of the soul changes. The aim of the intention and the act of the soul does not (just last) until the disposition of the body changes.

People imagine thus: that the intention is necessary for the deed, but the truth of the matter is that the deed must be for the intention. For the object of all is the moving about of the soul. It is the sojourner to the next world, and (eternal) happiness or misfortune will be its portion. Even though the body will be in view, it is but subservient, just as is the camel. For, although performing the Greater Pilgrimage cannot be accomplished without it, the camel is not the pilgrim. The turning about of the soul itself is not more than one thing: that it turn from this world to the Hereafter; rather, that it turn from this world and the Hereafter to God Most High. The direction of the soul does not precede its desire and inclination. When the desire for this world gains mastery over the soul, it turns to this world. Its attachment to this world is its desire and it was so at the beginning of creation. When the wishes of God Most High and of seeing the Hereafter dominate, its nature changes and it turns toward another direction.

Therefore, the aim of all deeds is the turning of the soul. The aim of prostration is not that the forehead turn in order to touch from the air to the ground. Rather, it is that the nature of the soul turns from passion and arrogance to humility. The purpose of (uttering) God is Greater is not that the tongue twist and flick about. Rather, it is that the nature of the soul should turn from glorification of the self to the glorification of God Most High. The purpose of casting stones during the Greater Pilgrimage is not to increase the number of stones at a particular spot or to exercise the arm. Rather, is that the soul stand firm upon its servitude (of God) and abandon the pursuit of appetite and the control of one’s own intellect, and become obedient to (God’s) command. He removes the reins from his own hand and surrenders them to the hand of (God’s) command. As he says: “At Thy service, in proof of Truth, in worship and as a slave.” The purpose of the sacrifice is not that a sheep be killed. Rather, it is that the foulness of miserliness depart from thy breast. Thou dost not have compassion for animals because of thy nature, but thou hast it because of the command (of God). When it is said: “Slaughter this sheep!” thou dost not say: “What has this wretch done? Why should I punish it?” Rather, thou abandonest thy self and, in truth, become non-existent. For, the servant (of God) is non-existent with respect to himself and he is truly intoxicated with God. All acts of worship are like this.

However, the heart has been so created that when an inclination or desire appears in it, when the body rises in agreement with that, that quality becomes more firmly and strongly established in the heart. For example, when mercy for the orphan appears in the heart, if the hand is placed upon (the orphan’s) head, that mercy grows stronger and the awareness of the heart increases. When the reality of humility appears, one acts humbly with body and soul, and these are two parts. Of these two, that which is in the soul is better. The reason for this is that the aim of an act of the body is for the confirmation of the desire and the action, while the deed will flow from another place to the soul. If the deed does (this), it is useful, but if it does not, and it is done heedlessly, it is futile. The intention without the deed is this; it is not futile. This is just as if there were a pain in the stomach. When one takes medicine and it reaches (the belly), the object is attained. If one smears it on the chest so that its effect reaches it, it is also beneficial, but it would be better if it reached the stomach directly. The object of that ointment which touches the chest is not the chest but the stomach. It will necessarily be futile if it does not spread to the stomach. That which reaches the stomach, even though it does not reach the chest, will not be futile.

*Disclosing That Which May Be Forgiven of the Whisperings of the Self, Evil Inspiration, and Bad Thoughts; and That Which May Not Be Forgiven and for Which One Is Culpable*
Know that the Messenger (S) said: “My people have been forgiven for whatever whisperings of the self there are”—and this is in both Sahih s. 9
“The Most High King tells the angels not to record it (when) anyone intends to commit a sin but does not. If he does it, it is recorded as a one bad deed. If one intends to do a good deed and (something) good, one good deed is recorded, even though he does not do that good. If he does it, ten good deeds are recorded.” In some Traditions, they are multiplied up to seven hundred. From this, some have imagined that one will not be culpable for every bad intention or thought. This is an error; we have shown that the main thing is the soul. The body is subservient to it. God Most High says: “Thou wilt be accountable for everything thou hast in thy heart, (whether) thou reveal it or conceal it.” And whether ye make known what is in your minds or hide it, God will bring you to account for it. (Q. 2:284) And He says: “The eye, the ear, and the heart, all three will be queried.” Lo! The hearing and the sight and the heart—of each of these it will be asked. (Q. 17:36) And He says: “They will not seize (you) for oaths in words on the tongue. They will seize (you) for what is intended in the heart. God will not take you to task for that which is unintentional in your oaths; but He will take you to task for that which your hearts have garnered. (Q. 2:225). It is not an offense for which they take (you) to task such as pride, hypocrisy, envy, and conceit. All of these are acts of the soul.

So, the truth which thou knowest in this section is that whatever occurs in the soul is of four kinds: Two are involuntary and one is not culpable for them. And, two are voluntary; there is culpability for them.

The parable of this is that one comes into danger as, for example, on a road where thou art walking and woman is following thee. If thou lookest back, thou wilt see her. This thought is called “the whispering of the self.”

The second is that a desire be aroused in one’s nature to look back. This is called “natural inclination.”

The third is that (the desire) commands one’s soul to look back. It commands this where there is no fear or shame to prevent it. For, it is not necessary for the soul to order everything be done which one’s carnal appetite demands. Instead, it may say that it is not a proper thing to do. We call this “the judgment of the soul.”

The fourth is that one intends slightly and determines to look back. This determination quickly becomes resolution, if the one does not dismiss the decree of the heart because one is frightened by God Most High or by people, so that that decision is nullified.

Thus, one is not culpable for the first two states which we call “the promptings of the self” and “natural inclination,” for they are not under one’s control and God Most High says: God tasks no soul beyond its capacity. (Q. 2:286) These promptings are such that ‘Uthman bin Maz’un said to the Messenger (S): “This self of mine says that I should castrate myself so as to be relieved of carnal appetites.” (The Messenger) said: “Do not do that, for the castration of my people is fasting.” (Q. 2:286) (“Uthman) said: “This self of mine says that I should also not eat meat.” (The Messenger) said: “No, for I love meat and if I were to obtain it, I would eat it, and if I were to ask for it, God Most High would give it (to me).” (“Uthman) said: “This self of mine says that I should go a mountain as do the monks.” (The Messenger) said: “Do not go, for the monkhood of my people is Pilgrimage and Defense of the Faith.” Therefore, these thoughts that occurred to him are the promptings of the self, and they are forgiven, for he had not decided to obey them and he had consulted about them.

As for the two which are at one’s choice, it is the judgment of the soul that it is should be done and it is the resolution of the soul to do it. One is culpable for both of these, even if one does not execute them because of shame, fear, or some other hindrance, but not for the sake of God Most High. The meaning of a servant (of God)’s culpability is not that anger comes to Him for a person and now he is punished in revenge, for the Divine Presence is beyond anger and revenge. Rather, it means that because of the intention that he had made, his soul has acquired a characteristic that causes it to fall more distant from the Divine Presence.

We have discussed this his wretchedness above, for his (spiritual) happiness lies in that he turn his face from the world toward God Most High, but his face is turned toward his desire. His affection is for that. Every desire and intention he makes related to the world strengthens his affection for the world, and he falls more distant from that which he needs. The meaning of his being culpable and accursed is that he becomes more involved (with the world) and more distance (from God). This is a matter that is by him, with him, and in him, too. However, there is neither delight at his devotion, nor is there anger at his sin so that He would take revenge upon him. However, such an interpretation is suitable for the people’s intellect.

No doubt remains for whoever has mastered these mysteries that one is accountable for the states of the soul. The absolute proof of this is that the Messenger (S) said: “Two men draw their swords against each other and one is slain. The slain and the slayer are both in hell.” They asked: “Indeed! Why the slain?” He said: “Because he had desired to slay the other if he had been able.” Another (proof) is that he said: “A man has some wealth which he does not use wisely. Another says: ‘If I had that, I would do the same.’ Both are equal in that offense.” This is nothing more than the intention of the soul. There is no doubt that if a person finds a woman in her nightclothes and lies with her on the supposition that she is an unknown woman, he becomes a sinner, even if she is (actually) his lawful wife. Moreover, if a person performs a formal prayer in a state of impurity thinking that he is in a state of purity, there is spiritual reward for him. But, if he thinks that he is in a state of impurity (when performing the prayer), he is a sinner, even if he remembers after completing the formal prayer that he had purified himself. All of these are conditions of the soul.

However, when a person intends to sin and then does not do so out of fear of God Most High, a good deed is recorded for him, as has been related in the Traditions. For, the intention was in agreement with (his) nature and refraining was a struggle in opposition to (his) nature, and the effect (of that abstinence) in brightening the soul is greater than the effect of the intention in darkening it. The meaning of the recording of a good deed is this and the meaning of that Tradition is this. However, if one refrains because of inability and one has not atoned for it, that darkness does not fall away and one is culpable for it, just as the slain man who was unable to kill his opponent and was slain himself.
Know that there are three kinds of deeds: acts of devotion, sins, and the permitted.

( The first kind: Sins ) It may be that because the Messenger (S) said: “Verily deeds are according to intentions,” that a sin, with a good intention, can also be counted as an act of worship. This is an error. Rather, on this one kind, intention has no effect on it, but a bad intention makes it worse. It is like this: a person backbites in order to please the heart of someone; or he establishes a mosque, school, or retreat using unlawful wealth and says: “My intention is good.” He does not know even this much: that it is not good because a resolution to do good with evil is another evil. If he understands all of this, he is a sinner. If he does not know and imagines that this is good, he is also a sinner, for acquiring knowledge is a religious obligation. Most of mankind’s perdition is from ignorance.

It is for this that Sahil Tustari said that there is no sin greater than ignorance; and ignorance with ignorance of the ignorance is greater because, if one does not know what he does not know, he will never learn and this becomes a veil and an impediment for him. In the same way, instructing a student—whose objective thou knowest to be the acquisition of wealth from judgeship, religious endowments, the property of orphans and the property of the ruler, the accumulation the things of the world, and the devotion of himself to contending for superiority and disputation—is unlawful.

If the teacher says: “My intention is to spread the knowledge of the Religious Law and (the student) uses in corruption, (and) I would be held culpable for my own (good intention)” This is pure ignorance. It is like the person who gives someone a sword to commit brigandage, or gives or sells grapes to a person he knows will make wine from them. He says: “My intention was generosity, for no one is dearer to God Most High than the generous.” This is out of his ignorance! Instead, if he knows that the man will commit brigandage, he should take the sword from his hand. How is it possible that it be lawful to give him another? Indeed, all of the forefathers took refuge with God Most High from the lewd scholar. They dismissed any student in whom they saw the effects of sin. Even Ahmad Hanbal dismissed a long-time student because he had seen that he had plastered the outside walls of his residence with mud plaster. He said: “Thou hast taken one fingernail from the highway of the Muslims. It is not proper to teach thee.” Thus, a sin with a good intention does not become a good deed. Rather, the good is that which has been commanded (by God).

The second kind: Acts of Devotion. In these, intention has two aspects with regard to effect: one is that its basis becomes correct with the intention; and the other is that however much the intention is increased, the spiritual reward is multiplied. Whoever acquires the knowledge of making an intention can make ten good intentions with one act of devotion, so that it becomes several acts of devotion. For example, when one goes into retreat in the mosque:

One declares the intention that this is the house of God Most High. Whoever enters it, is as though he has come to visit God. The Messenger (S) said: “Whoever enters the mosque has visited God Most High, and it is the right of the visitor to be honored by the visited.”

The second is that one awaits the next formal obligatory prayer, and in the Traditions, it is related: “The one awaiting the (beginning of) formal prayer is in the formal prayer.”

The third is that one makes the Intention so that with it the eyes, ears, hands, tongue, and feet cease movement. This is a species of fasting, for in the Traditions, it is related: “Sitting in the mosque is the monikhood of my people.”

The fourth is that one puts aside (worldly) works so that one gives the totality of his self to God Most High and busies himself with remembrance, meditation, and secret conversation.

The fifth is that one finds safety from the mixing with people and their evil.

The sixth is that if one sees some interdicted act in the mosque he forbids it. If one sees something (untoward), he commands (that it be stopped). If a person performs his prayer badly, he may instruct (him).

The seventh is that one may see some religious person and take him as a brother in faith, for the mosque is the resting place of the religious.

The eighth is that one is ashamed before God Most High to commit a sin in His house or entertain bad thoughts.

Make all acts of devotion analogous to this, for in each one many intentions can be made so that the spiritual reward becomes multiplied.

The third kind is the Permitted. Let no rational being who wallows in the permitted like heedless beasts neglect a good intention, for that is a great loss because he will be questioned about all of (these acts) and there will be a reckoning concerning all of the permitted things. He will be held accountable if his intention is bad. And, if it be good, it will redound to him. Otherwise, it will be quits. But he will have wasted time and spent it in that in which there is no benefit for him, and he will have disobeyed this verse: And forget not thy portion of the world and be thou kind even as God has been kind to thee. (Q. 28:77) That is, the world is transitory. Take thy portion from it so that it stays with thee. The Messenger (S)
said: “The servant of God will be asked about all that he has done, even to the amount of collyrium applied about the eyes, or the bit of earth rubbed with between fingers, or the hand placed upon the clothing of a brother.”

The study of the intention for the permissible things is lengthy, but it must be learned. An example is that using a pleasant scent is permissible and lawful when a person uses it on Friday (for the congregational prayer), (but) is not lawful when used with the purpose to display one’s wealth or to deceive the people, or in the pursuit of gaining some place in the hearts of strange women with the intent of corruption. However, good intentions are those such as the aim of showing respect and homage to the house of God Most High; and with the intention of the comfort which touches his neighbors, so that they are put at ease and that his own unpleasant (body) odor be dispelled and not annoy them, lest they fall into the sin of backbiting. 17 Or, he makes the intention to strengthen his resolve so as to purify it and increase its strength and to remember God Most High and to accustom himself to meditation and to be more able (to do so). These and the likes of these intentions occur to the person whose desire for good deeds dominates him, and from each one of these is a (divine) grace.

The servants of God among the forefathers were like that, for they desired that there be a good intention in every act of their eating, going to the lavatory, and lying (with their wives) so that not any one of these would be for no good reason. By making the purpose good, spiritual reward would come from it. Just as when they lie with their wives, they made their intention the siring of children and to increase the people of the Purified One (S); they declared the intention to comfort the family. 19 to preserve them from sin and to preserve themselves from sin. Sufyan Thawri put on his clothes inside out. They told him about that. He raised his hand to change them, then stopped and left his clothes as they were, saying: “I have put these on (this way) for the sake of God Most High. I do not desire to change them not for the sake of God Most High.” Zechariah (A) was working as a laborer some place; a group of people came to him. He was eating bread, but he did not ask them to eat. When he had finished eating, he said: “If I had not eaten all of the bread, I would have been left unequal to the task of (my employers’) work and would not have finished it. I would have forgone a religious obligation for a popular custom.” 20

Sufyan Thawri was eating when someone came to him. He did not say: “Eat” while he was eating. Then, he said: “If it were not for the fact that I had borrowed it, I would have invited thee to eat.” And he said: “Whoever says to someone: ‘Eat,’ while he dislikes that in his heart, if that person does not eat, he has committed one sin and that is hypocrisy. If he eats, he has committed two sins: one is hypocrisy and the other is that he has committed treachery to that person by setting him to eat something which he would not eat if he knew the heart (of the person offering the food.)”

Disclosing That Choice in Which Intention Does Not Enter

Know that when a simple-hearted man hears that there is an intention possible for every permitted thing, it may happen that he say with his soul or his tongue: “I have formed the intention to marry for the sake of God Most High,” or: “I eat bread for the sake of God Most High,” or: “I recite my lessons and give lectures in assemblies for the sake of God Most High,” and suppose that this is an Intention, while (instead), it is the speech of the tongue or the self. An Intention is an attraction and an inclination that appears in the soul, impelling that man to act, like an urge that importunes until one rises to answer it and act. This appears when motive appears and becomes dominant.

When there is no urge, the intention in words is like a sated person’s saying: “I have formed the intention to be hungry,” or when leaving a person, to say: “I have formed the intention to like him,” and this is absurd. Just as a person who has an appetite for (sexual) intercourse says: “I have formed an intention to father a child.” This is futile. When the motivation for the contract is the appetite, he says: “I have formed the intention to make the contract for the sake of (the Prophetic) Practice of the (Religious) Law.” This is futile. Instead, first, faith in the Law must be strong, then he must reflect upon all that has come down in the Traditions about the spiritual reward of marriage for the purpose of procreation, so that the zeal for that spiritual reward quicken inside of him so as to impel him to marry. This is the Intention itself, without its being articulated. For whoever is motivated to act by an eagerness for obedience (to God) to stand in formal prayer, this in itself is the Intention. (Just) uttering the tongue: “I have formed the intention (to perform formal prayer),” is useless. Just as when a hungry person says: “I have formed the intention to eat because of my hunger.” This is useless. For, when one is hungry, the eating itself is necessarily because of that (hunger). And wherever the enjoyment of the self appears, the intention for the Hereafter becomes difficult—unless the matter of the Hereafter has dominated all.

Therefore, the point of this is that thou know that intention that for that is not in thy control. For, intention is a desire that causes one to act, and thine action is according to thy power so that if thou wantest to, thou dost it; and if thou dost not want to, thou dost not do it. However, thy desire is not in thy control so that if thou desirest, thou desirest, and if thou dost not desire, thou dost not desire. Moreover, there is the desire which is created and there is the desire which is not created. The cause of its appearance is that belief occurs to thee. Thy motive in this world or the next world is tied to some matter so that it may be that thou becomest desirous of it. A person who does not know these mysteries defers many acts of devotion because the intention is not present.

Ibn Sirin did not perform the formal (itinerary) prayer at the bier of Hasan Basri. He said: “I do not find the intention.” Sufyan Thawri was asked why he did not perform the formal prayer at the bier of Hammad bin Sulayman. 21 He said: “If I had had the intention, I would have done so.” Someone requested Tawus for a supplication. He said: “Be patient until the intention comes, then I shall supplicate (for thee).” When they would ask him to narrate Traditions, sometimes he would not do it and other times he would suddenly narrate a Tradition, saying: “I was waiting for the intention to appear.” Someone said: “It has been a month that I have been trying to form a sound intention to visit such-and-such a sick person. It has not happened yet.”

In sum, so long as the zeal for religion and the fear (of God and the Hereafter) do not master a person, intention will not come appear for any good deed. However, it may come—with effort also—in (the performance of) religious obligations. It may be that intention does not come until one thinks again about the fire of hell and frightens oneself with that. When a person understands these truths, a person may leave off virtues and resort to
the permissible (but religiously indifferent). The intention for these permitted things is like that of a person who finds an intention for retaliation, but not for forgiveness. 22 With respect to him, retaliation is superior. And, it may happened that the intention for the night formal prayer not come, but one receive the intention to sleep so that one may arise in the morning at dawn. For him sleep was better. Moreover, if one becomes weary of worship and knows that if he spends an hour in recreation with his family or in conversation and pleasant talk with some person, his zeal will return, this enjoyment is superior for him than the intention to worship wortly.

Abu Darda (R) says: "I let myself play and relax from time to time so that the zeal for God Most High may return." 23 ‘Ali (R) says: "If thou keepest the soul continually in loathing, it will become blind." This is as though a physician gives meat to a sick person—even though it is of a hot temperament 23—to restore his strength in order to have the strength (to endure) the medicine. Or, a person flees from the ranks in a battle so that the enemy will pursue him. Then, suddenly he turns and strikes back at him. Fighters use many such tricks. The way of religion is all battle and debate with oneself and with Satan, and it comes to need (both) kindness and cunning. This is sanctioned by the great of religion, even though the deficient scholars do not know the path to that.

Excursus: [Whatever the Admirable Servant of God Does, He Does for the Sake of God] 23

Now that thou hast learned that the meaning of intention is motivation for action, know that there is the person whose motivation for devotion is the fear of hell. There is the person whose motivation is the blessings of Paradise. Whoever acts for the sake of Paradise is the slave of his belly and his genitalia and is killing himself so that he will fall in a place where he will satisfy his belly and his genitalia. And he who acts out of fear of hell is like the bad slave who does not work except out of fear of his master. Both of these have nothing to do with God Most High. On the contrary, the admirable servant of God is he who does what he does for the sake of God Most High, not in the hope of Paradise, or in the fear of hell. He is like the person who looks upon his beloved for the sake of the beloved, not because his beloved gives him silver and gold; for whoever looks for the sake of silver and gold, his beloved is silver and gold. Consequently, whoever’s beloved and adored one is not the beauty and majesty of the Divine Presence cannot form such an intention.

The worship of that person who has become thus is all meditation upon the beauty of God and conversation with Him. If he performs an act of devotion with his body, it is because he loves to carry out the command of (his) Beloved. Then he desires to also discipline the body in servitude and he serves that Presence, as much as he is able, lest his soul be restrained from the contemplation of that Beauty. If he refrains from sinning, he does so because he knows that following his carnal appetites veils him from the pleasure of witnessing and conservation with God Most High. The spiritually cognizant one is truly he.

Ahmad Khadruwiyah 24 saw God in a dream Who said: “All people seek something from Me except Abu Yazid who seeks Me.” Shibli, my God have mercy upon him, was seen in a dream. He was asked: “What has God Most High done with you?” He answered: “He criticized me because one time these words flowed from my tongue: ‘What loss is greater than this, that Paradise be lost?'” The true nature of this love and this pleasure will be discussed in the Chapter on Love, 2085 if God Most High wills it.

Part Two: Concerning Sincerity, Virtue, and Truth, and Their Degrees

As for the virtue of sincerity, since thou knowest that God Most High said: 26 22 ‘And they were ordered naught other than to serve God, sincere to Him in religion. (Q. 98:5) And He, may He glorified and exalted, said: Surely, pure religion is for God only. (Q. 39:3) He said: “The people have not been commanded except to worship with sincerity, and sincere religion is for God Most High alone.” The Messenger (S) said: “God Most High says: ‘Sincerity 26 is one of My mysteries. I have placed it in the soul of the servant whom I love.” And the Messenger (S) said to Mu’adh: “Act with sincerity so that a little will suffice.” Everything that we have mentioned concerning the censure of hypocrisy also concerns sincerity, for the opinion of the people is one of the causes for the cutting off of sincerity, and there are other causes also.

Ma’ruf Karkhi, may God have mercy upon him, used to scourge himself with a whip, saying: “O self! Be sincere in order to find salvation! ” Act sincerely in order to attain deliverance. 27 Abu Sulayman 28 says: “Blessed is that person during whose life (at least) a single step is correct in sincerity, so that in it he may have desired (nothing) other than God Most High.” Abu Ayyub Sijistani 29 says: “Sincerity in intention is more difficult than the basis of the intention.” Someone was seen in a dream. He was asked: “What has God Most High done with thee?” He answered: “All that I had done for His sake, I saw in the scale pan of good deeds, even a pomegranate seed that I had picked up from a road and even a cat that had died in my house. And I saw a thread of silk that I had tied to my cap in the pan of my bad deeds. There had been a donkey that had died that I did not see in the pan of good deeds. I said: ‘O glory be to God! The cat was among my good deeds, but not the donkey.’ He said: ‘That which thou hast sent from there has come there. When thou hearest (the donkey) had died, thou saidst: “(Nothing) except the curse of God.” If thou hast said: “In the way of God,” thou wouldst have received (the spiritual reward). I had given in charity for the sake of God, but people were watching and looking: their watching also pleased me. That was neither to my credit, nor to my detriment.” 30 Sufyan Thawri commented: “He 31 obtained a large
Someone says: “I was going by sea to fight in defense of the faith. One of my friends was selling a feed bag. I said (to myself): ‘I ought to buy it, use it, and then sell it in such-and-such a city at a profit.’ That night, I dreamt that two persons were descending from the heavens. One was saying to the other: ‘Write the names of the defenders of the faith and write so-and-so has come to do business, and so-and-so has come to see the sights, and so-and-so has come hypothetically.’ Then he looked at me and said: ‘Write that so-and-so has come to do business.’ I cried: ‘God! God! Look at my affair! I have nothing! How can I have come to do business? I have come for the sake of God Most High.’ He said: ‘O Shaykh! Didst thou not buy that feed bag in order to profit by it?’ I wept. I said: ‘God! God! I am not a businessman.’ (The angel) said to the other: ‘Write that so-and-so had come to fight in defense of the faith. On the way, he bought a feed bag in order to make a profit. Let God Most High give His decree concerning him as He wills.’”

From this, it has been said that in the sincerity of an hour lies the salvation of eternity. However, (unalloyed) sincerity is rare. It has been said that faith is the seed; the deed, the cultivation; and its (irrigating) water is sincerity.

There was a devotee among the Children of Israel. He was told that in such-and-such a place there is a tree where it was worshipped by a person and taken it as a god. He became angry and rose up. He placed an axe upon his shoulder in order to cut down that tree. Iblis, in the form of an old man, came before him on the road and asked: “Where art thou going?” He answered: “I am going to cut that tree down.” (Iblis) said: “Do not go. Occupy thyself with worship, for that is better for thee than doing that.” (The devotee) said: “This is my act of worship.” (Iblis) declared: “I shall not allow it!” and he began to fight with him. The devotee threw (Iblis) on the ground and sat upon his chest. Iblis cried: “Desist, so that I may tell thee something. If it does not meet with thine approval, then do what thou willest.” (The devotee) let go of him. He said: “O devotee, thou art a poor man and the people provide for thee. If thou hast something thou canst utilize and provide for other devotees, it would be better for thee than cutting down that tree. They will plant another and will not lose anything by it. Desist, so that every day I shall put two dinars under thy pillow.” The devotee thought this over and said: “Thou art right. It would be better if I gave one dinar in charity and spent the other than if I cut down that tree. I have not been commanded to do that, nor am I a prophet so that I would be duty-bound to do so.” So, in this opinion, he returned. The next morning, he saw the two dinars. He took them. The next day, he found another two dinars. He took them. He said: “It is good that I did not cut down that tree.” On the third day, he found nothing. He became angry, picked up the axe, and went out. Iblis came to him and said: “How far art thou going?” (The devotee) answered: “To cut down that tree.” (Iblis) said: “Thou art lying! Thou wilt never be able to cut down that tree.” They began to fight and (Iblis) overthrew the devotee as though he were a sparrow in the hand (of Iblis). He said: “Go back home! If thou dost not, I shall cut thy head off right now like that of a sheep!” (The devotee) said: “Desist, for I am going back. But tell me the truth. How is it that the other time I was superior and this time thou?” (Iblis) answered: “Because at that time, thou wert angry for the sake of God Most High, and He made me subservient to thee. I cannot compete with anyone who does something for the sake of God Most High. However, this time thine anger was for thyself and for the money. We are stronger than anyone who pursues his own passions.”

The True Nature of Sincerity

Know that as thou hast come to know intention, which is the motivation in one’s action and its importuner, if that importuner is one, it is called sincerity (or purity). If there are two importuners, it is “mixed” and not pure. “Mixed,” for example, is like this: One is fasting for the sake of God Most High, but there is also the aim for good health. Or, it is also for the purpose of reducing the consumption of provisions. Or, so as not to take the trouble to cook and prepare food. Or, one has something to do so that one does not fall asleep and will be able to do the work. Or, one frees a slave so as to be relieved of the expenditure for him, or to escape (the slave’s) bad nature. Or, one performs the Greater Pilgrimage so that one become strong and healthy from the trip, or to tour and see (different) lands, or to get rest from one’s wife and children and their troubles for a few days, or to escape the troubles (caused by) an enemy. Or, to perform formal prayer at night so as not to fall asleep and be able to watch one’s goods.

Or, to acquire knowledge so as to be able to earn one’s keep or to be able to preserve one’s own goods and property, or to be valued and honored, or to teach and lecture at gatherings to escape the sorrow of silence and not be lonely. Or, to copy the Book so that one’s handwriting may become good and straight. Or, to go on Pilgrimage on foot so as to save the cost of hire. Or, to purify oneself in order to be blessed and clean, or to perform the Greater Ablution in order to have a pleasant (body) scent. Or, to seclude oneself in the mosque so that one will not have to pay house rent. Or, to give charity to a beggar so as to be relieved of his importunity and insistence, or to give something to the poor because one is ashamed to withhold it. Or, to visit the sick so that should he himself become sick, they will visit him, or so the sick person not complain about him and take offense, or to do some good deed for one of these, so that he be known for righteousness. This is hypocrisy and we have discussed the verdict about hypocrisy.

However, all of these thoughts nullify sincerity, whether it be to a smaller or greater extent. Rather, (sincerity) is pure when there is absolutely no portion in it for oneself. Instead, it is purely for the sake of God Most High. As when the Messenger (S) was asked what sincerity was, he said: “That thou sayest: ‘My Lord God! Then thou becomest correct as thou hast been commanded.’” “Thou sayest: ‘O God,’ then, thou taketh the straight path as has been commanded.”

And, so long as a person is not liberated from the traits of human nature, this is extremely hard. Concerning this, it has been said that nothing is harder or more difficult than pure sincerity, and if in a lifetime one step is correct in sincerity, there is hope for salvation. In reality, extracting a pure and sincere act from among the motives and traits of human nature is like extracting milk from intestinal feces or from blood. As He said: From betwixt the refuse and the blood, pure milk palatable to the drinkers. (Q. 16:66) Therefore, the remedy for this is that, first, one cuts the ties to the world and that the love for God Most High becomes supreme, so that one becomes like a lover whose every desire he desires is for the sake of
of his beloved. If this person eats food and goes to the privy, for example, it is possible that there can be sincerity in that. He who is mastered by his love for the world can be sincere in formal prayer and fasting (only) with difficulty, because all acts take on the character of the soul and incline to that side to which the soul inclines. The deeds of whoever is dominated by his love for rank are directed at people so that when he washes his face in the morning and dons his clothing, it is all for the sake of the people.

Pure sincerity is in no act more difficult than in holding assemblies, teaching, the narration of Traditions, and that which is directed at people; for, usually the motivation is popularity, or is mixed with that. So, the object becomes popularity when the object should be being procuring the proximity (of God), either stronger or weaker. However, most of the religious scholars are incapable of keeping their souls pure from these considerations, except the fools who suppose that they are sincere and are deceived by that; they do not recognize their own defects. Indeed, many of the astute are incapable of this.

One of the saints says: “I made up the formal prayers of thirty years, all of which I had performed in the first rank, because one day I arrived late and stayed in the last rank. In my heart, I found that I was ashamed before the people who would say that I had arrived late. I understood (then) that my delight had all been from being seen by the people in the front rank.” Therefore, (pure) sincerity is that which is hard to comprehend theoretically, and practicing it is even harder. Anything that is shared and insincere is not acceptable.

Excursus: [Fraud In Worship Has Four degrees]

Know that the great have said that the two bows of formal prayer of a learned person are superior to one year’s worship of the ignorant person, because the ignorant person does not understand the detriments of an act. He does not know about the mixing of it with (other) motives and he imagines everything is purely sincere. Fraud in worship is just like fraud in gold. There is some gold at which whoever looks supposes to be gold and it even deceives a moneychanger, except for the master moneychanger. But, the ignorant suppose everything to be gold which looks like gold, and is not gold.

Fraud in worship that cuts off sincerity has four degrees, some more hidden and obscure. We record them as hypocrisy in order to expose them:

The first (degree) is that when a servant of God is performing a formal prayer and people come, Satan says: “Do it better lest they criticize thee.” This is itself obvious.

The second degree is that one knows this and avoids it. Satan says: “Do it better so that they will follow thee and thou mayst have the spiritual reward of their following thee.” It may happen that he falls for this deceit and does not know that the spiritual reward of being followed is at the time that the light of his humility spreads to others. However, since he was not humble, but that is the opinion of others, the spiritual reward is theirs, and he will be held culpable for his own hypocrisy.

The third degree is that one knows that performing formal prayer in private different from (one’s formal prayer) in public is the essence of hypocrisy. One makes the decision to pray well in private so as to be able to do it as he does in public. This is more obscure, but it is also hypocrisy. However, one does this dissembling and hypocrisy to oneself, because one is ashamed of oneself that one’s private praying should be different from when (he is) in the congregation. Because one prays well in public, one does the same in private and supposes that he has escaped the public hypocrisy, whereas in reality if he has also become a hypocrite in private.

The fourth degree is the most obscure: that one not know that the humility in private or public for the sake of people serves no purpose. Satan says to him: “Think again about the greatness of God Most High. Look! Dost thou not know where thou art standing?” Therefore, he thinks again and becomes humble and becomes adorned in the eyes of the people. If it is thus, that in private such thoughts do not customarily appear in one’s heart, the reason for this (act) is hypocrisy. However, by this trick, Satan has presented it to him so that it remains veiled. Since one remembers the greatness of God Most High when one sees people, it is useless. On the contrary, being seen by the people and being seen by beasts of burden should be the same to him. If he finds a difference, he is not yet devoid of hypocrisy. We have spoken of this example in (the chapter) concerning hypocrisy.

Concerning other motivations that we have discussed before this, there is much deception in the same way. Whoever does not understand these niceties keeps himself in sorrow and strives hard in vain and that which he does is all lost. It is with regard to this that God Most High said: And the evils that they earned will appear unto them, and that whereat they used to scoff will surround them. (Q. 39:47)

Excursus: [A Composite Intention Is Not Devoid of Spiritual Reward]

Know that when an intention has become composite, if the intention for hypocrisy or some other motive be more dominant than the intention for worship, this will be a cause of punishment. If they are equal, it will be the cause neither of punishment nor of spiritual reward. If it be weaker, the act will not be devoid of spiritual reward. However much the Traditions indicate that when there is a sharing (of the object of the act of worship), it is said: “Go and seek thy reward for that from the person for whom thou hast done it!” but it is obvious to us that it is intended by (saying) that, that
both aims are equal. Therefore, there is no reward when one seeks it and it is said: “Seek it from that person.” At that place where the Tradition is the evidence of punishment, the intention is that all (of the deed) be for the purpose of hypocrisy, or that it be the dominant (motive). However, when the main motivation be the procurement of (divine) favor and the other (motive) be weak, (the act) should not be without spiritual reward, even if the spiritual reward does not achieve the degree of that which is purely sincere. We make this choice for two reasons:

One (reason) is that it has become known to us with proof that the meaning of punishment is the distancing of the soul from suitability for the Divine Presence. The reason for this is that the veil is burned by fire. The aim for proximity is the seed of (spiritual) happiness, while the aim of hypocrisy is the seed of hardship. Compliance with these two aims is aiding them. One distances one (from God) and the other draws him closer. When they are equal, one turns a handbreadth farther and the other a handbreadth nearer, then they return to their former positions. If it becomes half a handbreadth closer, loss and distancing are obtained. If it becomes half a handbreadth farther, the nearness remains; as when a sick person eats a hot food and eats an equal amount of cold food, they become equal. If he eats less (of the cold), the hotness increases somewhat. If it increases, something of the hotness is decreased. The effect of sinning and devotion on the illumination and darkness of the soul is like the effect of medications upon the condition of the body. One atom of that will not be lost. Its preponderance or deficiency will be determined in the scales of justice. This is: And whoever has done an atom's weight of good will see it. (Q. 99:7) However, discretion is caution in that, for it may be that delight is the stronger motive, but one supposes it to be the weaker. The way of safety is that one close off the way of private motive.

The other reason is that there is a consensus that if a person transacts business on the way to perform the Greater Pilgrimage, no loss to his Pilgrimage is incurred, even though its spiritual reward is not like the spiritual reward of the (purely) sincere. However, since his main purpose is the performance of the Greater Pilgrimage and the business is secondary, on the whole, its spiritual reward is not lost to him, even though there may be some decrease. A person goes to fight in defense of the faith for the sake of God Most High, but one may go to fight in (either of) two regions. In one region, they are the rich and there will be much booty, in the other region, they are the poor. He goes to fight in the region of the rich. He should not lose his spiritual reward completely, for a man is not devoid of that in himself which distinguishes between obtaining and not obtaining booty. God save us, if this were a condition, there is the fear of obtaining spiritual reward, for no deed would be correct—especially lectures, teaching, writing, and that which is directed towards the people. Since the person does not receive everything of himself directly from that, it will not be devoid, for example, (the possibility) that his writing be ascribed to another, or his words attributed to another who has learned of them, even though one may be displeased by that information.

Part Three: Concerning Truthfulness

Know that truthfulness is close to sincerity and its degree is great. Whoever achieves the perfection of truth is called "truly righteous." God Most High praises this person in the Qur'ān: ... men who are true to that which they have covenanted with God. (Q. 33:23) And He said: That He may question the truthful of their truthfulness. (Q. 33:23) The Messenger (S) was asked: “In what does perfection lie?” He replied: “Speaking the truth and acting in sincerity.” As a result, knowing the meaning of sidq is important, and the meaning of sidq is "truth." This veracity and truth lie in six things; whoever achieves perfection in all of them is a witness of truthfulness:

The first truthfulness is that of the tongue, that one utter no lies in what he reports about his past and present, or a promise one gives about the future. We have noted before that the soul acquires the character of the tongue and a distorted soul comes from crooked speech, while it becomes straight from a truthful tongue. The perfection of this truth is with two things:

One (perfection) is that one does not speak in parables so that, though one speaks the truth, a person understands something else. However, there is the situation when speaking the truth is not advisable, such as during war, between a man a woman, and in making peace between people; there is permission to lie (in those situations). But the perfection of this is that in such a situation, one speak in allusions and as much as possible not utter explicit lies. If one does so, since he is sincere in his purpose and intention and he speaks for the sake of God Most High, no deed would be correct—especially lectures, teaching, writing, and that which is directed towards the people. So long as a person does not receive everything of himself directly from that, it will not be devoid, for example, (the possibility) that his writing be ascribed to another, or his words attributed to another who has learned of them, even though one may be displeased by that information.

The second truthfulness is with the intention that one not desire anything which procures favor, except that of God Most High; nor does one admire anything with that. This is pure sincerity, and sincerity is also called truth. Whoever harbors any thought in his conscience other than seeking His favor is a liar in the worship that he displays.
The third truthfulness is resolution: that a person resolve that if he had governmental authority, he would be just; if he had wealth, he would give all of it away in charity. If someone should appear who would be superior to him in governance, lecturing, or teaching, he would surrender (his post) to him. Sometimes this resolve is strong and decisive in him, at other times it is weak and hesitating. That which is unhesitatingly strong is called “resolute truthfulness,” as when it is said: “This appetite is a liar,” that is, it has no root; and: “It is truthful” when it is strong. The witness of truthfulness is he who always finds his resolution for good deeds at maximum strength, as ‘Umar (R) said: “I would prefer to be taken and have my head struck off to being the commander of a people among whom is Abu Bakr.” He had found the strong resolve in himself to endure having his head struck off. There is the person who, if given the choice between being killed himself and the killing of Abu Bakr, would prefer his own life. There is a great difference between that and him who would prefer his own death to being in command of Abu Bakr.

The fourth truthfulness is in faithfulness to one’s resolve; for, it may happen that one’s resolve be strong in risking one’s life in battle or in surrendering one’s position to a better in government, but when the time comes (to act), the self does not obey. Concerning this, God Most High said: …men who are true to that which they have covenanted with God. (Q. 33:23) That is, they are faithful to their own resolve and they sacrifice themselves. Regarding some folk who had resolved to give of their wealth, but were not faithful (to their word), He said thus: And of them is he who made a covenant with God (saying): If He give us of His bounty, We shall give alms and become of the righteous. Yet, when He gave them of His bounty, they hoarded it and turned away, averse. (Q. 9:75-76) to where He said: because they lied ; (Q. 9:77) until He called them liars in their covenant and promise.

The fifth truthfulness is that one do not any act that is not of the nature of one’s inner character. For example, if a person walks slowly on the road (in a dignified manner) while inside him, there is no dignity; he is not truthful. That truthfulness comes from the concordance of the inner self and the public, and that is appropriate for a person whose essence and inner self is better than his exterior, or is the same as his exterior. About this, the Messenger (S) said: “O Lord God! Make my inner self better than (my) public self, and make my public self good.” Whoever does not have this quality, in which the exterior reflects the interior, is a liar and falls away from truthfulness, even though his aim is not dissimulation.

The sixth truthfulness is that one seek the true nature of oneself in the stations of religion, such as asceticism, love, reliance, fear, hope, contentment, and enthusiasm, and not be satisfied with their explanation and appearances. For, no believer is completely devoid of these states though they may be weak. Whoever is strong in these is truthful in them. As He said: The (true) believers are those only who believe in God and His messenger and afterward doubt not, but strive with their wealth and their lives for the cause of God. Such are the truthful. (Q. 49:15) Therefore, whosoever’s faith is complete is called “truthful.” They are like the person who is afraid of something. The sign of this is that he trembles and his face turns pale; he cannot eat or drink and he is anxious. If a person fears God Most High in this way, it is said that this fear is genuine. However if one says: “I fear sinning,” but does not stop (sinning), he is called “liar.” In all the stations, there are many such distinctions.

So, whoever is truthful in all six of these meanings, and then it is at perfection (in them), is called “truly righteous.” Persons who are truthful in (only) some of these are not called truly righteous, although their degree is according to their truthfulness.

Summary of the Contents of the Complete Alchemy of Happiness

As for (the Alchemy’s ) Prolegomena, it is about the knowledge of four things; and its Pillars are the four forms of conduct. For each Pillar, there are ten Chapters, as is found in the Contents: four Topics, four Pillars, and (each Pillar having) ten Chapters. [All of this book and its contents are what has been cited, should God Most High will it! ]

The Prolegomena on Being a Muslim

The First Topic: That is to know the true nature of oneself.

The Second Topic: That is to know God.

The Third Topic: That is to know the true nature of the world.

The Fourth Topic: That is to know the true nature of the afterlife.

[And these four studies are in fact (the knowledge of) being a Muslim.]
The (Four) Pillars of Being a Muslim

These Pillars of Being a Muslim are divided into four: Two concerning externals, and two concerning internals. The two Pillars concerning externals are: the First Pillar, the execution of God’s commandments, and this is called the Acts of Worship. The Second Pillar is about observing proprieties in movement and rest and in social intercourse, which is called Mutual Relations.

As for the two Pillars concerning internals, the first [the Third Pillar] is about the cleansing of the heart of immoral traits, such as anger, miserliness, envy, pride, and conceit. These traits are called the Destroyers and obstacles on the road of faith. The other Pillar [the Fourth Pillar] is the adornment of the heart with desirable traits, such as patience, gratitude, love, hope, and trust (in God). They are called the Deliverers.

The First Pillar is about the Acts of Worship and has Ten Chapters. The first chapter: making right the beliefs of the orthodox and the congregation; the second chapter: engaging in the search for knowledge; the third chapter: concerning purification; the fourth chapter: concerning performing formal prayer; the fifth chapter: concerning the poor rate; the sixth chapter: concerning fasting; the seventh chapter: concerning performing the greater Pilgrimage; the eighth chapter: concerning the recitation of the Quran; the ninth chapter: concerning the Remembrance of God and Glorifying Him; and the tenth chapter: observing the formulae and the times of worship correctly.

The Second Pillar is about Mutual Relations and also has Ten Chapters. The first chapter: the rules of eating; the second chapter: the rules of marriage; the third chapter: the rules of business and trade; the fourth chapter: concerning seeking the lawful; the fifth chapter: the rules of social intercourse; the sixth chapter: the rules of seclusion; the seventh chapter: the rules of travel; the eighth chapter: the rules of the whirling dance; and ecstasy; the ninth chapter: the rules of enjoining the good and prohibiting the bad; and the tenth chapter: the rules of governing.

The Third Pillar is about Overcoming the Obstacles on the Road of Faith, which are called the destroyers, and also has Ten Chapters. The first chapter: concerning the disclosure of the discipline of the self, the treatment for bad character, and the obtaining of a good character; the second chapter: concerning the appetites of the stomach and the genitalia; the third chapter: concerning the remedy for bad language and the calamities (resulting from) speech; the fourth chapter: concerning treating the diseases of anger, hatred, and envy; the fifth chapter: concerning the love of this world and the sickness of greed; the sixth chapter: concerning the treatment of stinginess and avarice for the accumulation of wealth; the seventh chapter: concerning the treatment of the love for high rank and pomp and its evil; the eighth chapter: concerning the treatment of hypocrisy and sowing discord in worship; the ninth chapter: concerning the treatment of arrogance and conceit; and the tenth chapter: concerning the treatment of heedlessness, error, and pride.

The Fourth Pillar is about the Deliverers and also has Ten Chapters. The first chapter: concerning repentance and emerging from darkness; the second chapter: concerning patience and thankfulness; the third chapter: concerning fear and hope; the fourth chapter: concerning dervishhood and asceticism; the fifth chapter: concerning truthfulness and sincerity; the sixth chapter: concerning reckoning and guarding; the seventh chapter: concerning meditation; the eighth chapter: concerning (Divine) Unity and trust (in God); the ninth chapter: concerning love and zeal; and the tenth chapter: concerning the remembrance of death.

In this work, we explain these four topics and the forty points for Persian speakers. We have refrained from penning long, abstruse phrases and fine, difficult distinctions so that the general public may comprehend it. Should a person have the desire for more detailed and refined information about this, he must consult books in Arabic, such as The Revival of the Religious Sciences, The Jewels of the Quran, and other works that we have written about these matters in Arabic. The object of this book is the general public, who have cried for such a book in Persian. The level of discourse must not exceed their ability to understand.

May God Most High purify their intention in their earnest request and our intention in complying with it. May He [bless us with favor and] keep it pure from the pitfalls of hypocrisy and the offense of dissimulation. May He open wide the hope of His mercy and the right path. May He grant facility and success so that that which is said becomes faithful to behavior, for words without action are a waste and declaring without practicing will be a cause of trouble in the Hereafter. We seek refuge with God from that.

Bibliography of the Translator

This is not a bibliography devoted to Ghazzali and his works but rather to the sources used in preparing this translation. Neither is it an exhaustive list of all the books I have consulted in preparing this translation and the notes, but it does give the chief ones. When a work is noted (usually by the abbreviation at the end of the bibliographical reference) at the end of a footnote between parentheses, it indicates that it was the principal source for the note, although works may have been consulted.
For the translation itself, in addition to the basic texts edited by HK and AA, I have consulted standard references (cited by the abbreviated names used in the list below at the end of the entry) including the dictionaries of Steingass, Aryanpour, Mu'in, Hughes, Nadwi; translations of the Holy Quran by Pickthall, Yusuf Ali, Muhammad Ali, Arberry, etc., and the Holy Bible (King James and Revised Standard versions).

Resources consulted for the general and biographical footnotes include: Fihrist (invaluable for its biographical notes in addition to the intrinsic worth of the text), EI, SEL, IKh, Bosworth, Bukhari, Hughes, ‘Attar, Hujwiri, Lata’if, AIH, HOH, Khalid, Sirah, Ibn Ishaq, Hussain, Tabaqat, CIH, Rahmun, and Qushayri.


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Paul and Early Christianity: Paul in Christianity and Islam, Conversion, Stoning of Stephen, Paul and the Law, Circumcision, Immaculate Conception, Paul and the Apostles (Peter, James, John, and Barnabas), Paul’s Death and Legacy, Doctrinal Disputes; Companions of the Cave, Companions of the Inscription, Barsisa, Companions of the Ditch, St. George, Afterword to the Bible; Map, Glossary, Coded Bibliography, Index.

Armageddon: The Second Coming, the Paraclete, Millenarianism and Armageddon (from Jesus above, published separately); Glossary, Coded Bibliography, Index.
1 Though the chapter title reverses the second and third topics, this is the order in which Ghazzali actually discusses them.

2 “heart” (dil): or, “soul.”

3 “Many are killed...knows better.” That is, many die in battle between the defenders of Islam and their opponents, but only God knows the purity of their intentions: were they fighting solely for Islam, or did the hope of obtaining booty play a part?

4 “dowry” (kabin): In Islamic law, the dowry is given by the husband to the wife, not the reverse, as was (and still is in many places) the European custom.

5 In order to stress his point, Al-Ghazzali first gives the Arabic terms, then follows with the Persian equivalents.

6 From the AA text.

7 Note the play on the different meanings of the hawa: air and passion.

8 Ghazzali is referring to the lowering of the head to the ground in prostration (sujud) in formal prayer.

9 “both Sahih’s”: That is, both of collections of Traditions called Sahih, that of Bukhari and the other Muslim. Among Sunnis, these are the two most highly regarded collections of Traditions of the Prophet.

10 ‘Uthman bin Maz’un: a Companion of the Prophet, the fourteenth among them to accept Islam. He was one of those sent to Ethiopia to escape the Quraysh-led oppression in Makkah and was the first of the Muhajirs (emigrants from Makkah) to die in Madinah, the Prophet at his side.

11 A reference to the abstention from sexual intercourse during the hours of fasting. This remark was prompted by ‘Uthman bin Maz’un’s renunciation of sexual intercourse with his wife as an act of self-discipline, which the Prophet cautioned him against, pointing out that his wife had rights too.

12 “evil”: the unlawfully acquired wealth.

13 “several,” following AA’s text. HK has “ten,” but only eight are enumerated.

14 That is, the time one spends sitting in anticipation of the beginning of the formal prayer is considered part of the time spent in that devotion.

15 “Permitted” (mubahat): or, “optional,” acts to which Islamic law is indifferent. Acts for which neither punishment nor spiritual reward may be expected. However, Ghazzali says that there will be some kind of account for these too.

16 “stay with thee”: That is, “stay with thee to the Hereafter.”

17 “backbiting” (ghibat); in this case, criticizing him in his absence because of offensive body odor. The custom of putting on a perfume or scent when going to the mosque, especially for the congregational prayer on Friday, is maintained to this day, especially in warm countries.

18 the Purified One (S) (Mustafagh): An epithet for the Prophet Muhammad (S).

19 “the family”: here, a euphemism for wives. That is, to satisfy lawfully the natural desires of the women.

20 That is, if he had shared his meal, he would not have been strong enough to fulfill his obligation to his employer. This obligation took precedence over the sharing of his meal that custom dictates.

21 Hammad bin Sulayman: A Traditionist mentioned by Ibn Qutaybah in Al-Ma’arif.

22 “retaliation” (qisas): the law of retaliation: a life for a life, an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth, etc. It may be invoked for loss of life or bodily injury or commuted to payment to the victim’s relatives in the case of death, or to the victim himself in case of injury. The forgiveness mentioned is the commutation to monetary payment, or outright forgiveness. In this illustration, the person cannot find the intention in his heart to commute what is due, but can find the intention to exact the full penalty for the wrong.

23 A reference to the theory of hot and cold foods. Hot foods should not be given to persons suffering from certain ailments. In this case, the hot food, since it is strengthening, is given to the patient to enable him to endure the medicine, just as today patients are often strengthened before undergoing operations.

24 From the AA text.
Ahmad Khadruwiyah: Abu Hamid Ahmad bin Khadruwiyah al-Balkhi. A soldier, he married Fatimah, the daughter of the Amir of Balkh. She was already renowned as a Sufi. She accompanied Ahmad on a visit to Bayazid during which she removed her veil. This angered Ahmad, but this remarkable woman replied that while he was her natural spouse, Bayazid was her religious consort. They settled in Nishabur. Ahmad wrote well-regarded treatises on ethics and mysticism. Among his sayings: “Hide the glory of poverty.” His association with Bayazid places him in the 3rd Islamic (9th CE) century. (Hujwiri)

“Sincerity” (ikhlas): It should be pointed out that the Arabic word ikhlas can also mean “purity, liberation, candor, loyalty,” etc.

AA and HK differ on the exact wording of this saying of Ma’ruf Kharki and Ghazzali’s paraphrase of it. They vowel the Arabic differently: ya nafsi, akhlisi takhlasi (takhlasi—a form that does not occur in standard Arabic—is probably a misprint for takhlusi) (HK); ya nafsu, ukhlus takhallusi (AA) They would mean, respectively: “O my self, be faithful (in order) to be liberated/saved” (HK); and “O self, be pure/liberated (in order) to be my deliverance.” Ghazzali’s paraphrase also differs in each text: khalas kun ta khalas yabi (HK) and ikhlas kun ta khalas yabi (AA); meaning, respectively: “Set it free/leave it alone in order to find deliverance” (HK), and “Act sincerely in order to find deliverance” (AA). The choice of words in the translation of this passage has been made with attention to the context.

Abu Sulayman: Probably Abu Sulayman Darani: {Abu Sulayman Darani: Abu Sulayman ‘Abd al-Rahman bin Ahmad al-Darani. A native of Damascus, he was one of the earliest mystics and was influential in the formation of mystical doctrine. He died shortly after AH205/820CE.}

Abu Ayyub Sijistani: No other information about him from available standard sources at present.

Literally, “that also was for myself and not upon me”: It did not benefit me nor did it cause me loss; that is, an act with neither religious merit nor detriment.

“He” following AA’s text. HK makes the subject of the sentence “a young man” (jawani), which seems less appropriate here.

That is, the narrator of the preceding story was fortunate that he was not considered guilty of flaunting his charity.

The feed bag tied to the noses of beasts of burden, especially horses, mules, and donkeys containing grain or fodder for them to eat. It is a trivial item, but the point of the story is, of course, that even trivialities can seriously corrupt intention.

That is, the Quran.

The complete verse is: And lo! In the cattle, there is a lesson for you. We give you to drink of that which is in their bellies, from betwixt the refuse and the blood, pure milk palatable to the drinkers. (Q. 16:66) The separation of milk from blood and the contents of the intestines in the human (and animal) body is a sign of the handiwork of God, and a metaphor for the spiritual sustenance which God gives mankind.

Literally: “acceptance by the people” (qabul-i khalq).

From the AA text.

From the AA text.

He goes there because there is the prospect of greater booty.

“Veracity” (sidq): A word of Arabic origin meaning “truth, veracity, sincerity, candor,” etc.

“Truly righteous” (sidiq): or, “faithful witness of the truth.”

The Arabic sidq and the Persian rasti are virtually synonymous. I use “veracity” for the former and “truth” for the latter merely to distinguish them in this passage. A parallel construction, giving a word in both Arabic and Persian, much favored in Persian literature, as is the same device in English of pairing words of Anglo-Saxon and Latin or French origin. There is an exact parallel here, for “veracity” is of Latin origin, while “truth” is from Old (Anglo-Saxon) English.

“A man and a woman” (mard wa zan); or “a husband and wife.”

That is, ‘Umar did not consider himself worthy to give orders to Abu Bakr.

The full text of the passage is: And of them is he who made a covenant with God (saying): If He give us of His bounty, We shall give alms and become of the righteous. Yet, when He gave them of His bounty, they hoarded it and turned away, averse. So He hath made the consequence (to be) hypocrisy in their hearts until the Day when they shall meet Him, because they broke their word to God that they had promised Him, and because they lied. (Q. 9:75-77)